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An Irish family's Journey Unlocks White House Door From Cooley Pen. to Penn. Ave.

By Dr. John McGavitt

Like so many people around the world I watched the U.S. presidential election with considerable interest. It was piqued further when I noticed the Irish genealogical findings of Megan Smolenyak about Vice President Biden.

Some of his ancestors emigrated on two vessels to New York during the Great Hunger from their home in the Cooley Peninsula in County Louth - just across Carlingford Lough from where I live in County Down.

As fate would have it, some twenty-five years ago I compiled a database of over 5,000 people who emigrated direct from Newry, County Down to New York between 1845 and 1850. I knew they would feature on the passenger lists of both vessels. It was just a matter of finding the database.

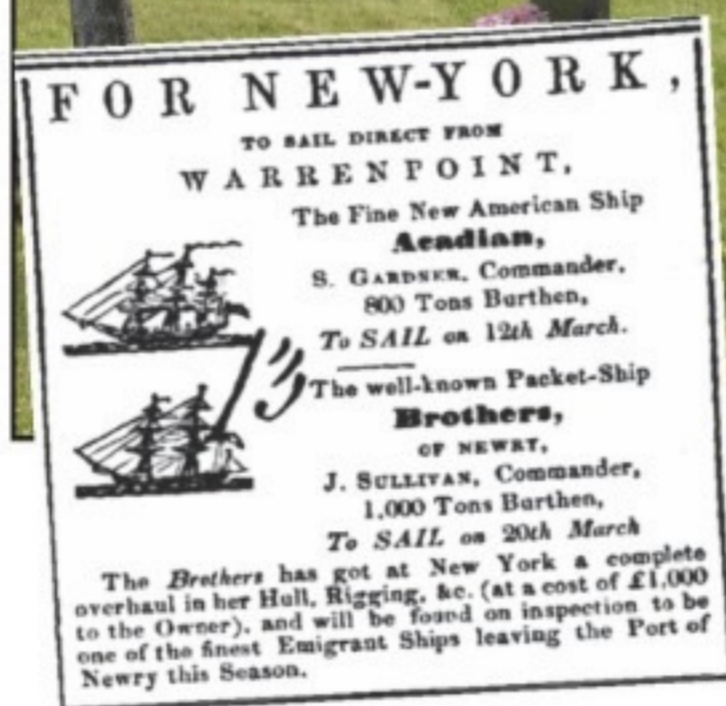
Locating it, I had recorded that Joe Biden's great, great Grandfather, "Owen Finnigan" emigrated on board the Brothers on 31 May, 1849 and that he was a "locksmith."

Just to be sure I consulted the original passenger list records again and confirmed it. So, a locksmith from County Louth emigrated from poverty stricken Ireland, unlocking the door to the White House for one of his descendants. An Irish twist on the familiar theme, log cabin to White House.

Owen Finnigan was one of 200 people who sailed on the Brothers, 1000 tons. In those days the port of Newry had very considerable connections with North America. Before the completion of sea locks which facilitated larger ships sailing to and from it on the canal, the oldest summit level waterway in Great Britain



Then Vice President Joe Biden and Fr. Malachy Conlon at the Finegan family grave in Templeton, County Louth, June 25, 2016. PHOTO BY SAM BOAL ROLLINGNEWS.IE.



Newspaper ad for the sailing of the Brothers.

and Ireland, bigger vessels departed from its satellite port of Warrenpoint.

The Finnigans would have had to travel along the southern shore of Carlingford Lough and then catch a ferry across to the northern shore at picturesque Narrow Water, before proceeding to the dock which still exists at

nearby Warrenpoint. It was reputedly built by French prisoners of war from the days of Napoleon.

Their journey across Narrow Water and departure from Warrenpoint have a contemporary as well as historical relevance. The long mooted bridge at Narrow Water looks like it is going to eventually be realized, the first cross border bridge to be built since partition.

The Brothers, under the command of Captain Sullivan, with Owen on board, sailed from Warrenpoint on 10th April

1849, arriving in New York on 31st May. Passengers publicly thanked Captain Sullivan "for his unceasing kindness and attention to us since we left our native shore."

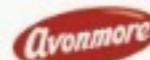
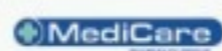
The Brothers arrived two days after the Seraphine (241 passengers), also from Warrenpoint. It had sailed ten days later than the Brothers. Such were the vagaries, and often the dangers, of transatlantic travel. Better to arrive later than not at all.

Continues on page 2



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